

# Selective Mutism

## Information leaflet for parents and educational settings

### Early Years Service

We work with children under 5 living in Hackney who have difficulties with:

- Understanding language and following instructions
- Using words and sentences
- Communicating and playing with their friends and family
- Hearing, listening & attention
- Pronouncing words & sounds
- Stammering or stuttering
- Eating and drinking

Children who are in Hackney schools are seen by their school's link Speech and Language therapist and can be referred via the school's SENCO.

### How we work

We work with children and their parents at home, in Children's Centres or in their nursery / playgroups – whichever is best for the child and family.

We work together with lots of other people, including teachers, Health Visitors and Early Support Workers.

### Contact details

#### Speech and Language Therapy

Tel: 020 7683 4262

Email: [hello@gethackneytalking.co.uk](mailto:hello@gethackneytalking.co.uk)

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## Selective Mutism: What is it?

Selective Mutism, sometimes referred to as Situational Mutism, is an anxiety disorder which manifests as specific social anxiety about speaking in certain situations. Children with Selective Mutism may be comfortable speaking at home or with specific people such as family members, but may not be able to speak in other environments such as at nursery or school, or in the community.

Children with Selective Mutism are **unable to speak** in certain situations; it is **not that they choose not to speak**.

### How can I help at home?

Parents play a vital role in supporting their child's communication development.

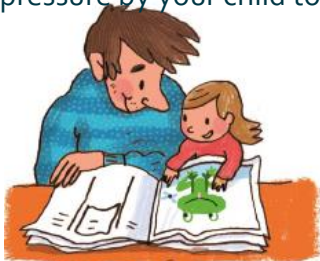
### Top Tips for Home

#### Special Time

Special time is 5-10 minutes of 1:1 daily play with an adult. Set aside some time in the day where you can have 1:1 time with your child, turn off all electronics, and follow your child's lead in play.

#### Turn questions into comments

Turn direct questions such as "what's this?" into comments like "it's a car", to reduce any perceived pressure by your child to speak.



#### Accept however your child communicates

Accept both verbal and non-verbal responses from your child in environments which they are less comfortable speaking in. If your child uses a non-verbal way of communicating, such as gesture or pointing, accept this and label the item for them.

#### Avoid drawing attention to your child's talking

If your child does speak aloud, it is important to reward their talking with ongoing interaction, but do not draw attention to it.

#### Acknowledge your child's anxiety around speaking

In a one-to-one situation, speak with your child about their difficulties, using phrases such as, "I'm going to help you" and "I know that it must be difficult".

### How can I help at school?

Adults at nursery and school can support the child to participate in learning activities.

### Top Tips for School

#### Avoid direct questions

Avoid asking direct questions in whole class or 1:1 contexts, or specifically calling on the child to answer a question in whole class activities. Instead, turn questions such as "what shape is this?" into comments such as "I wonder if this is a *circle* or a *triangle*".

#### Confidence building roles which don't involve speaking

The child could be the door-holder or give out snacks at snack-time, to support their confidence and self-esteem without putting pressure on them to speak.

#### Accept non-verbal responses as well as verbal ones

If the child uses a non-verbal way of communicating, such as pointing, accept this and label what they want for them.

#### Avoid drawing attention to the child's talking

Avoid reward systems such as sticker charts for talking, or drawing attention to when the child talks. If the child speaks aloud, continue the interaction but don't draw attention to the fact that they have spoken.

#### Opportunities to build relationships with a key adult

It is important that the child has opportunities to build a relationship with an adult they can feel comfortable with in school. The adult can support this by setting up regular 1:1 special time with the child in school.

#### Opportunities to play with other children

Set up games or activities which don't involve speaking but provide opportunities to play with other children.

